MASSACHUSETTS SILVER COINAGE

By ANTHONY TERRANOVA

The American Numismatic Society
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This *Handbook* is intended to accompany the 18 slides described herein. The coins represented are all in the collection of the American Numismatic Society.

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Massachusetts Silver Coinage

The silver coins issued by the colony of Massachusetts Bay were the first coins minted on the territory of what is now the United States of America. The Oak Tree and the large flan Pine Tree issues in particular have an artistry and elegance to them which has not been surpassed since.

The first coins issued were the New England shillings, circular blanks with counterstamps on either side, appearing in June 1652. After October 1652 the minting of the crude Willow Tree coins began. The commencement of the mintage of the Oak Tree coins is deemed to have been in 1660, the large flan Pine Tree coins in 1667, and the small flan Pine Tree coins in 1675. This traditional arrangement is, however, subject to dispute. In any case the minting of precious metal coins without a royal grant was illegal.

The Willow Tree shillings are so called from the appearance of the tree, as are the Pine Tree shillings. The name Oak Tree may have originated with Sir Thomas Temple, who defended the colonists' illegal action by saying that the tree was the royal oak in which the young king had hidden from Cromwell's soldiers. The king then called the colonists "a parcel of honest doggs."

The coins were minted under the direction of the mint masters John Hull and Robert Saunderson. The coinage is believed to have ended when a final contract with Hull and Saunderson expired in 1682, followed by Hull's death in 1683. The quantities issued were probably very large. The technology used for the Oak Tree and large flan Pine Tree coins is disputed, although a primitive rocker press has been suggested by R. G. Doty, with a screw press being used for the small flan Pine Tree issues.

New England Shilling

1. Noe 3-C obverse

2. Noe 3-C reverse

The New England shilling issue consisted of circular blanks, hand stamped with prepared punches: NE on one side, XII (for twelvepence) on the other. There are six currently known die marriages, varying only slightly.

Slide 1

New England Sixpence

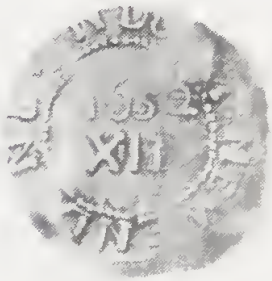
3. Obverse

The New England sixpence issue used similar circular blanks, again hand stamped with prepared punches: NE on one side, VI on the other. Currently only one genuine die marriage is known.

The NE punch is not squared as in the shilling issues, but shaped to fit the NE monogram. The same holds true for the unique NE threepence, now in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Willow Tree Shilling

4. Noe 3-E obverse

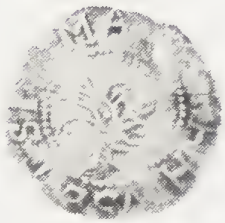


5. Noe 2-B reverse

The Willow Tree shilling issue consisted of circular blanks, probably hand stamped with prepared hand cut circular dies. There was one obverse and reverse legend arrangement. These dies were probably held with some sort of pincer device, and not properly secured, as most known specimens show very dramatic rotated multiple striking. There are six currently known die marriages, each unique in its own look.

Slide 3

Willow Tree Sixpence



6. Obverse

The Willow Tree sixpence is likewise found on circular blanks, probably hand stamped with prepared hand cut dies. The mint used the same manufacturing process as for the shilling issues, for the coins show the same rotated multiple striking. There is one currently known die marriage.

Willow Tree Threepence

7. *Obverse and reverse*

These coins likewise have hand stamped circular blanks, with the same manufacturing peculiarities and only one known die marriage. Only two specimens of the variety are currently known.

Slide 5 and Slide 6

Oak Tree Shillings

8. Noe 9 obverse

9. Noe 5 reverse

10. Noe 14 obverse

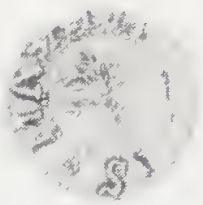
These are found on circular blanks struck with hand prepared dies—the exact manufacturing process is a matter of controversy. There is one obverse legend arrangement, IN MASATHVSETS and two reverse arrangements, AN DO NEW ENGLAND and AN DOM NEW ENGLAND. Eight distinct tree styles are spread over approximately sixteen or seventeen currently known or accepted die marriages.

The top coins have the obverse and reverse of an Oak Tree shilling of the regular style. The bottom coin has the obverse of an Oak Tree shilling of a later tree style, where the increasingly spindly appearance of the tree makes it resemble a pine tree more and more. This variety (Noe 14) thus falls at the end of the Oak Tree series.

Oak Tree Sixpence

11. Noe 22 obverse

12. Noe 21 reverse



13. Noe 16 obverse

These coins are likewise found on circular blanks struck with hand prepared dies, although the manufacturing process is also a matter of controversy. There are two obverse legend arrangements, MASATHVSETS or IN MASATHVSETS. This issue has three varieties of the reverse legend: IN NEW ENGLAND ANO, NEW ENGLAND AN DOM, and NEW ENGLAND ANO. Four distinct tree styles make up approximately eight known or accepted die marriages, two of which are occasionally found over cut down Oak Tree shillings.

The top coins have the obverse and reverse of an Oak Tree sixpence with a fine style. The bottom coin has a rougher style, with many ground lines and an oak tree seedling below the main tree.

Oak Tree Threepence

14. Noe 24 obverse

15. Noe 26 reverse

These coins have circular blanks struck with hand cut dies. There are two obverse legend arrangements, MASATHVSETS and IN MASATHVSETS, and only one reverse, NEW ENGLAND. This denomination has five tree styles making up approximately eight or nine known or accepted die marriages.

Oak Tree Twopence

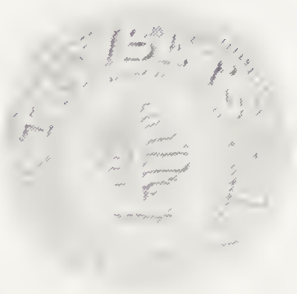
16. Noe 29 obverse

17. Noe 33 reverse

Once more, the coins have circular blanks, struck with hand cut and altered dies. There is one obverse legend arrangement, IN MASATHVSETS, and one reverse, NEW ENGLAND. This entire denomination is struck from one pair of dies which was cut and hand altered throughout its life, making up approximately seven accepted die varieties.

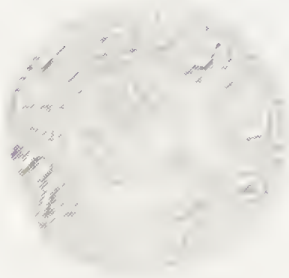
Slide 10

Pine Tree Shilling: Large Flan Size



18. Noe 1 obverse

19. Noe 1 reverse



20. Noe 3 obverse *21. Noe 6 obverse* *22. Noe 8 obverse*

These coins have circular cut out blanks, probably made in some sort of roller or rocker press minting process. These are made from more finely and carefully prepared cut dies. There is one obverse legend arrangement, IN MASATHVSETS (one variety leaves out the letter H), and one reverse legend, NEW ENGLAND AN DOM. These have six tree styles with approximately sixteen currently known or accepted die marriages.

The first two coins (18 and 19) have the obverse and reverse of a Noe 1, with a very fine and elaborate tree style—perhaps because these were the first coins struck using new methods and the mint officers wanted to impress their superiors. There are what appear to be berries below the lowest branches. At the bottom left (20) is one of the largest trees of the series, the Pine Tree of Noe 3. The next coin (21) is Noe 6, where the tree has the peculiarity of two branches growing out of the same place on the right side of the trunk. Finally, at the bottom right (22), are the curved branches of Noe 8, with what appear to be holes in the center of the trunk, a characteristic of this variety.

Slide 11

Pine Tree Shilling: Small Flan Size

23. Noe 16 obverse

24. Noe 16 reverse

25. Noe 15 obverse

26. Noe 21 obverse

These coins have circular, possibly machine cut and hand adjusted blanks. They were probably struck in screw presses. Again, there is one obverse legend arrangement, IN MASATHVSETS, and one reverse, NEW ENGLAND AN DO. There are seven tree styles making up approximately twenty-one known die pairs. This issue constitutes by far the greatest number extant of the shilling denomination of Massachusetts silver.

The top coins have the obverse and reverse of Noe 16 and may be among the first small flan varieties struck. As we observed with the large flan Pine Trees, the first coins struck by new methods were often very well done and in a fine style. A Noe 15 (bottom left), by contrast, has a cruder style, with straight tree branches and a very long ground line. Finally (bottom right), the Noe 21 shows a rather crude tree with stubby branches, some of them with no needles.

Slide 12

Pine Tree Sixpence

27. Noe 33 obverse

28. Noe 33 reverse

Once more, these coins have circular blanks struck from hand cut dies. There are two known die marriages, one a hybrid from the previous Oak Tree sixpence issue, and the other (by far the more numerous) is usually found with the obverse off center toward 12 o'clock. Both die marriages in this denomination were apparently struck from dies too large to accommodate the flans.

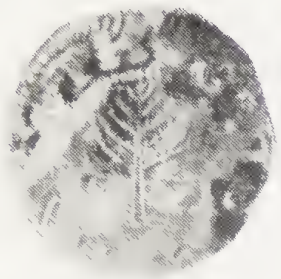
Pine Tree Threepence

29. Noe 36 obverse

30. Noe 36 reverse

These coins have circular blanks, again struck from hand cut dies. There is one obverse legend arrangement, MASATHV-SETS, and two reverse arrangements, NEW ENGLAND and ANO NEW ENGLAND. There are approximately seven known and accepted die pairs and two tree styles.

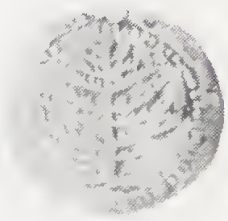
Pine Tree Shilling "Witch Pieces"



31. Noe 10 obverse

Massachusetts tree money is occasionally found bent and then straightened. This bending is traditionally attributed to the superstitious practice of carrying around a bent coin to ward off the spells of witches and may have some link to the Salem witch hysteria of 1692.

Pine Tree Shilling Clipped Flan



32. Noe 3 obverse

These are probably the result of a larcenous person shaving silver from the edges of a large flan Pine Tree shilling and then trying to pass the cut down coin as a small flan type for its full shilling value.

Slide 16

Cut or Segmented Massachusetts Silver

33. Noe Pine 10 reverse

34. Noe Oak 14 obverse

These are possibly a merchant's crude attempt at making change from full weight shillings. The legal weight standard was 72 grains for twelvepence—a shilling. These cut coins may have been smaller denominations that circulated based on their weight in grains. These fragments were recovered from the wreck of the H.M.S. *Feversham*.

Clippings from Shillings

35. Noe Oak 6 reverse

36. Charles I obverse

These pieces possibly represent what that aforementioned larcenous individual stole from full weight coins and did not get a chance to melt. Clippers were often caught and hanged, while their hidden clippings remained as hoards to be discovered by later generations. The slide shows a clipping from an Oak Tree coin, plus a full round edge clipping from a contemporary English coin—a Charles I shilling of 1639.

Slide 18

Further Reading

This reading list includes some of the more important monographs which address Massachusetts silver exclusively. The student of the series will also want to consult catalogues of major auctions, such as those of the Garrett, Norweb, Picker, and Roper collections, plus periodicals for specialists in this field, notably the *Colonial Newsletter*.

Walter Breen, *Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins* (New York, 1988), pp. 11–18. This section on Massachusetts silver is short, but authoritative.

Christie's, 7 Feb. 1989 (H.M.S. *Feversham*), 852–1080. This very important shipwreck contained many examples of Massachusetts silver; the cataloguing was done by the author of this slide set.

Sylvester Sage Crosby, *The Early Coins of America* (Boston, 1873–75). The first scholarly treatment of Massachusetts silver, this volume includes many of the most relevant documents plus a die arrangement which is still used today.

Richard G. Doty, "Making Money in Early Massachusetts," John M. Kleeberg, ed., *Money of Pre-Federal America* (New York, 1991), pp. 1–14. The author argues that the Oak Tree issues and the large flan Pine Tree issues were made on a primitive rocker press.

John M. Kleeberg, "A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Massachusetts Silver at the American Numismatic Society," John M. Kleeberg, ed., *Money of Pre-Federal America* (New York, 1991), pp. 181–214. A catalogue of some outstanding examples of Massachusetts silver.

Eric P. Newman, *The Secret of the Good Samaritan Shilling, Supplemented with Notes on Other Genuine and Counterfeit Massachusetts Silver Coins* (New York, 1959). This great numismatic detective story demolished a major fantasy coin of the Massachusetts series. Newman also lists some new varieties, including genuine coins, contemporary counterfeits, and modern fakes.

Sydney Philip Noe, *The Castine Deposit: An American Hoard*, ANSNNM 100 (New York, 1942). Noe discusses the most important hoard for Massachusetts silver. Noe's study of this hoard led him to do die studies of Massachusetts silver, which were published as: *The New England and Willow Tree Coinages of Massachusetts*, ANSNNM 102 (New York, 1943); *The Oak Tree Coinage of Massachusetts*, ANSNNM 110 (New York, 1947); and *The Pine Tree Coinage of Massachusetts*, ANSNNM 125 (New York, 1952). The latter three volumes contain the standard die studies of Massachusetts silver.

Richard Picker, "Variations of the Die Varieties of the Massachusetts Oak and Pine Tree Coinage," Eric P. Newman and Richard G. Doty, eds., *Studies on Money in Early America* (New York, 1976), pp. 75–90. An updating of Noe by a major dealer-scholar.

Carl Würtzbach, *Catalogue of Collection of Massachusetts Colonial Silver* (Lee, MA, 1937). A set of photographic plates showing Würtzbach's collection—important because this was the largest assemblage of photographs of these coins up to that date.